

Topic	Laboring For a God Who Fights for Us
Reference	Nehemiah 3
Date	10 November 2019
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Today, I want to give you Nehemiah, son of Lee. His father gave himself that name because when he came to know the Lord he took to the Book of Nehemiah and in fact he is very famous for building walls and if you go to web site, you have Nehemiah walls, but what is more interesting is the way the web site takes it self. Look at what it says,

We aspire to take the LEAD in the practice of INTEGRITY in the construction industry by going the EXTRA MILE in providing COST EFFECTIVE solutions PROFESSIONALLY with INTEGRITY and HUMILITY.

This is a statement of faith and Nehemiah not just gets involved in his work which he applies kingdom principles, he is very involved in the ministry and he started something known as The Encubator, which is basically teaching young Christians to do start ups and two weeks from now we will get Dr Lim Kah Hooi to come up here and he will share with us on what are business as missions. Since we are mission mind, we are going to look at business as missions. How you look at missions from the other side, the side of sustaining a mission but my question to you is which is his ministry.

Is his ministry in his work because he is very obviously applies biblical principles to it or it is ministry in The Encubator, which is the call of Nehemiah. So today we want to look at one area which I am quite passionate about because my wife told me one thing, don't always do family life. She is quite right, there is a place for it but there is another area which we rarely speak about which I feel passionate to do. It is your job. Today, we are going to talk about market place and God willing there should be ministry we should really look at in the church.

We will look at how you and I behave in our jobs. Now let me qualify myself. I am not a big shot. I am an architect, being running my own practice for 20 years and I got nine staff. So probably not like a big shot like all you guys but I understand a little bit about an SMI, how to run your finances, how to do HR, how to lobby for business. So where is scripture in all of that? Where is the call of God in all of that? So today we will look at the marketplace. We will look at all of you, in your jobs, tomorrow we go back to jobs from Monday to Friday, where is the Lord?

HISTORY:

Let me give you a bit of history. Jerusalem was the kingdom of God or at least that's how the Jews see it. Nehemiah begins the difficult task of taking all this rubble and to build a wall and he builds it in a record 52 days. If you read the Book of Ezra, it took them 20 years ago build a temple, he builds this in 52 days. So it is an interesting thing. There are three point I want to pick out

- Work and Kingdom Mindsets
- Work and leadership
- Work and Identity

We are going to do a bit of recap at chapter 1 and 2 before we go to 3 and then the first thing I want to start is simply this, for all of us when you go to work, the question is how do you define purpose and success. That's the key thing we are going to look at. You see purpose is not enough if you don't succeed in it. A lot of you are quite senior. When we all start off work we were all excited, we are going to do this, we had dreams, that was your purpose, your define a purpose then along the way life hits you, hits you really hard and some succeed and some don't. So purpose and success are very defined together and this is what the world teaches you. The key word here is 'YOU'.

YOU decide, YOU are king of your life and your jobs. YOU are captain of your destiny, take control of your job and get what you want. That's what the world teaches you. In psychology they call it self actualization. That means after you have made money, you climb up the corporate ladder, you are not happy, you want to find purpose, you do CSR, by the time the very-very-very few get up there make tons of money and become very successful they want to have legacy or like one developer friend told me, it is your own business. You want to have a foundation. This the epitome of self centeredness. It is the epitome of I am God of my life. So that when I die you remember my name, that's the world.

Let's look at how Nehemiah looked at purpose and how he looked at success and first look at the definition of purpose, it come from the beginning chapter, when he opened his ears and he heard the situation of those who went back. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, the gates have been burned with fire, people who live there are in trouble and disgrace. His starting point and purpose wasn't a self-actualization that I am going to be famous for doing this. I am going to be well known for doing this. I am going to be the next inspirer for everyone. Nehemiah's purpose was in the needs of people. His purpose was grounded in the will of God because he remembers the covenant God and the covenant God is the exiles will return back and so we got to the great chapter which Sam did such as amazing sermon and here is success,

Give your servant success

And his success and his purpose is grounded in the will of God and the world teaches you ground it in self, but for us is in the will of God and he gives all of his comforts to become a contractor, to build a wall in 52 days. That's purpose for you.

Lim Kah Hooi ran top management HP. He is one of the top trainers in the country. Some time ago he said, you know what, I am going to start a Bible school. He gave it all up, started a Bible school, teach Christians now about marketplace. In two weeks' time come and listen to him. What he says is right, your business or your work should be more than the bottom line, can it have an eternal value. It should have, it should be part of God's salvation plan. It should have kingdom values found in the gospel and that is why we are going to look at it today. Now let me give you a simple reason why you should do that.

As smart as you are you can't figure out everything. So in simple common sense, you have got to have a longer stretch, you have got to invest in kingdom reality. I am going to give you a few examples of people doing it. First thing what Nehemiah Lee did was, he declared the kingdom of God in a line which is full of corruption and this is what he said,

We conduct our business operations with integrity because we want to glorify God in and through business. It's a value we hold dear right from the beginning.

It is a cost of carrying the cross

Because we do not believe in giving bribes, we have to work harder to ensure what we deliver has quality and is on time. When our clients want a cost-effective supply, they will come to us.

So someone to take a stand like this, there is a price to pay. Here is another example. This is one of America's most well known fast food restaurant Chick-fil-A and he is a Southern Baptist and look at what he said,

Three values:

- 1. who will be your "Master?"*
- 2. who will be your "Mate?"*
- 3. what will be your "Mission?"*

His company is completely build on scripture and again there is a price to pay. The LGBT community has launched a war against him.

So, here is a price that we pay for all of us. In business and in work to carry the cross there is a price but our God is faithful, and he calls us this morning to define success and define purpose in the gospel and is not easy.

To understand purpose and success you have to define work and that is found in Romans 12:1. Work is worship, is my hands and my legs and my talent, whatever I eat, whatever I do as Paul says I do it all to glorify you. Work is worship. The problem we ask is that we have compartmentalized the two, work is work, church is church. So, don't talk about what they do at work. They don't come and tell you I struggle with this. Church is where I do my ministry. Now that is a very big danger in this and you can flip two sides;

1. Because you don't talk about your work, it is okay. Whether you are dealing, you are cheating your tax, whether you are dealing in corrupt practices, whether you are squeezing your vendors, whether you are really treating your staff badly, it is okay because I am a ministry leader. That is called salvation by works. That's a guilt conscious.

A lot of successful people give money to the church, they are trying to buy out God you know. You can buy out a small company, you cannot buy God out. Here is the opposite extreme, you are going nowhere in your work. I was brought up in a church that told me ambition was a sin. I am telling you, so called gospel centered reformed churches can really teach you subtle heresies. I was like that for many years then afterwards reality kicks in, you have to pay bills, you have to pay for children's education, you have to pay your loan, you are not in America where there is social security. And after a while the church became my character, the church became my identity, the church became my idol. Both are unbiblical. Here is a simple thing we see in Nehemiah, which is his ministry, is both why because if he wasn't the king's cupbearer he will not have been the builder of the wall. That's God providence. Do you know what is the single most

important quality to be a cupbearer to the king, which is I think today they will tell you in business especially if you are a right hand man to the top guy. The one quality you cannot buy with money, you can be very creative, you can be technical, you can be a very good manager is called trust and he is an exile.

So you are trying to imagine now, you have a Persian king, you have a minority group he rises to be number two because the king trust him. and because the king trust him, God has a providence, brought him to the point in his history that says, now you will build a wall. So God set this in motion years before. If Nehemiah wasn't trustworthy he wouldn't have raised up in the ranks and you know Jewish history to be the bearer of the colonel master is betrayal and then he gets to the point where he hears something and he builds the wall, both are ministry. Here is what work is telling me? My church ministry impacts my career decision. Because I get Godly values when I am in Bible study, when I am serving, that effects how I do my work and my career growth completes my spiritual journey. It finances things. I can now finance missions. I now have a platform in my work five days a week to show kingdom values. It completes it. Both are interconnected.

So let me just give you five points how in your every day job you can develop this. Remember we are all in our Father's business, kingdom building:

- How do you view your career advancement?
Nehemiah never bothered, he just got up to the top and when he goes to the top God told him give it up. So, here is all CEOs, all you people who make a turnover of 5 million above and make tons of money. Fantastic when you get to a point and God whispers to you give it up, can you do that.
- How do you view financial gain?
We read last week chapter 6, he didn't take money from the governor's pay, he gave out his portion because people were suffering.
- How do you view what you do as glorifying God?
I am an architect, you are a lawyer, you are a software engineer, you are a teacher, how are you glorifying God, how are you excelling in what you are doing because God is a God who does good works. In creation when he finished it, he said it was good. So, we short the work and do a crappy job, you are not glorifying God. Joseph was in jail, but he glorified God. You could be a street cleaner, you glorify God.
- What do you struggle to change in your daily work process?
Here is where it all comes out one. For example, some people tell me I am very arrogant, you know why, because I run my own business, I don't know what it is like to listen to people. I only know how to tell people. The problem with this guy is you are too used to telling people what to do, you come to us in the committee meeting you also just tell us what to do, you never listen. We all have our sinful areas.
- How do you treat others in your work environment?
How you treat the people lower in ranks and treat them as God's creation. The little-little things you do really make the difference. When you honour God, God honours you as well.

Let me give you a few things about leadership.

1. A leader has to have a vision. Where does his vision come from?
 - i. he listen to the people
 - ii. he waited upon the lord
 - iii. he shared the vision.

Now here is the key thing. The question is not about sharing the vision or having a vision, the question is empowering the vision. That is the key issue. You see once we go to end of chapter 2, it is no longer Nehemiah building, it is the people building. So here is something maybe I struggle with, maybe the reason why the Mentimeter score is so poor is because we have not empowered you. So the vision becomes the vision of the elders, not the vision of the church. There is something for us to look at.

2. A leader needs discernment with integrity

Jesus said this, behold I am sending you out and sheep in the midst of wolves, to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. One thing we really-really lack as Christians is discernment. Let me tell you where his discernment is. Chapter 2 verse 11,

12I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

13By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal a Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.

16The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

What you hear is this word, no one knew I went by night. That's discernment. Why didn't he make an announcement, I am going to build the wall, have a groundbreaking ceremony, declaring to Jerusalem Times, because there was opposition. He was smart enough, before he get buy in from the stakeholders he kept it very quiet and he did an audit.

We saw in chapter 5 how the nobles were cheating people and look what he says in verse 12,

12"We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. 13I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!"

This is a man who understands discernment.

3. Godly creative leadership

Why do we do that because we are in the image of a God that creates. God is a creator and it was good and so creative leadership is lacking especially nowadays especially in this economy and the way the world is changing with AI and Data Analytics, this is the key thing and we tend to think this is secular and not gospel centered. I beg to differ.

Nehemiah did creative leadership, he started the wall by getting buy in.

1 Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.

Nehemiah purposely started:

1. With the Sheep Gate.
2. With the high priest.

There are two reasons for it:

1. The high priest is the descendant of Yeshua who is the high priest of Zerubabel. During those days, if you are the high priest you are number one. If the high priest will build the people will build that's called discernment also.
2. Why the Sheep Gate? Because the sheep Gate is nearest to the temple. All the pilgrims went through the Sheep Gate. So the first thing he did is, in anything you are doing you start off smart. He started off smart by getting key stakeholders in and he got it by the priest.
3. He mashed the right people with the right task and there is a key in the whole text and please this is very gospel centered.

He had the priestly communities buy in. We got it because the Levites went in, the temple servants, so he has got now a manpower group. Secondly, he got the business community in, the business community he had goldsmith, perfume makers and merchants. Now have you noticed that he is very selective because during those days if you are in the trade, you are in the gill. The goldsmith and perfume makers know the city. The bakers sat there and people come and buy bread from you, it is a vendor business you know. A goldsmith is a targeted business, they knew the city. Second group he took were the families. Everyone was building opposite his house. This is what we call scalability. This is his major workforce.

Secondly, he had the man in the surroundings town, Jericho and Tekoa but the nobles don't want to do it, which means not everybody agrees. Now Tekoa is the place which is in a plane open to attack from Sanballat. He basically goes and tell them, you are in danger, the Sanballatians are going to hit you first. They say okay we will build. They bring in their numbers. This is called critical mass. The town comes. A family is build of five people, a town come is 300 people and Jericho understands.

He also brought in the rulers of surrounding areas. Why? He understands political connection. You have no political connection, you don't have numbers. So what I am trying to tell you is here is a man who is creative and creativity is something which I think Christians lack. We are to be creative in this country where things are against you. Creativity is a character of God. So we never say this is secular is biblical. Let me give you two other points in this, tenacity. We will take that in the week after next, because a real measure of leader is when opposition comes and chapter 4 was so fantastic I am going to do a sermon by itself, when people intimidate you, when people cut off your funding, when people charge you your wrong

things, when people put you into a lawsuit and you have to go to high court to file your defense. That's when your real metal comes out when you don't shake and break under pressure, but here is the last and key quality. A lot of this you can say, hey what so gospel centered about this. It is this, it is servant leadership

In the end Nehemiah doesn't see himself better than the others. He sees himself as a servant. He sees himself as one of the leaders and Paul say this in Philippians 2:3-11

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

That is our biggest struggle in work when we compartmentalize our lives.

Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

That's Nehemiah.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

There we have the gospel. The kingdom of God is the gospel and gospel values should be there in your workplace, in the market and the way you do work in church. Now you may stop there and you say, you know what, I am not a leader. On one hand it is true because Ephesians tells us leadership is a gift but on the other hand what is Nehemiah's story is about. It is about the called out people coming back because God keeps his covenant. They are laboring for God and God will fight for them. You are the called out people, you are ambassadors, you are called out to preach the good news, you are called out to be salt and light in the world, you are called out to be a testimony.

WORK AND IDENTITY:

You like it or not, your work defines you especially for men. In God's economy our identity has very little to do with my type of vocation. The problem with work ties back with the issue of purpose and success. If you are very successful in what you do, it will get to your head. You will think that you are something special. That's why I will say this in love. People who are successful come to church carry themselves in certain way. If you are running your own business and you are successful subconsciously you carry yourself. On the other hand if you are not doing very well and you come to FBC and you find everybody got a lot of money, you are very poor, you are very lonely down the level, it is not the matter of the mind, it is the matter of the heart. You feel you don't measure up.

But if a cupbearer can become a construction worker what do you think God is telling us, God doesn't care. You could be a drain sweeper and the drain sweeper will be closer to the kingdom of God then a specialist doctor. God doesn't care. He wants you and I to worship him in work and everything we do. Colossians says,

Colossians 3:17,22-24 (NIV)

17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Christians should excel in everything they do, they should be very ambitious for God sake climb up to become a cupbearer you will influence this country for the kingdom as working for the Lord not for human masters.

Let me give you another example of a man who understands failure. Tan Sri Chan Ah Chye. I knew him personally because I was his architect. In the 90s, there was no bigger company than Talam and his subsidiaries UroPlus and Larod. I remember going as a young architect, they will queue. In 2005 he lost money; the government put in regulation on his side. In 2005 he was 5 billion in depth. Here is a man who understands failure and success the way the Lord sees it and he gave a sermon in a testimony in SIB a few years ago and he gave eight principles. In the eyes of the world he is a failure, in God's economy I think he is succeeding because his identity is not in these things.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

¹⁰For we are God's **handiwork**, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The word handiwork here, the Greek rendering is the word poiema. It comes from the word poem. It means you and I whether you are a specialist doctor, developer, a student, a lecturer, drain cleaner you are God's work of art. You are God's masterpiece. You are God's poem. Go out there and live like that. That is your God given identity.

Who is next to you?

You see Nehemiah build a wall with goldsmiths, merchants, village people and all sorts of people. Today God is building FBC but our builder is not Nehemiah, it is Jesus Christ. We are not building a wall, we are building a church. So my question is this, if Nehemiah had run a Mentimeter questionnaire would he have gotten the same score.

I want to ask you two questions.

1. you go back to work tomorrow, what kingdom values are you going to give to your company because there is no separation from ministry and church and your work out there.
2. the chapter is telling you everybody build, even the bakers build. Nehemiah wasn't building the wall, he was building his people and I ask you where are you in FBC and if you cannot tell us who is next to you, you are not building the church.